Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 4 | Issue 3 Article 13

7-1-1987

Williamson, INTRODUCTION TO HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

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impossibility of proving *a priori* that there are causes because such a putative proof would already be using the conclusion presumed to be proved: i.e., reasoning as an act is causing; the accidentality, priority, and dependence of existence as the nerve center of the *De Ente et Essentia* demonstration.

A small book, Owens' *An Interpretation of Existence* must be counted a worthy companion to that goodly company of works dedicated to both expounding and expanding the wisdom of St. Thomas Aquinas that have graced the middle and declining years of this century. That Father Joseph Owens is perhaps the finest master of the text of Aquinas living today is widely recognized. The new edition of this treatise on being will heighten our awareness that Owens is as well a profound metaphysician in his own right. Both author and new publisher are to be saluted.

Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of Religion, by **Raymond Keith Williamson**. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984. xii + 388 pp. Cloth $44.50; paper $14.95.

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The first and least consequential part of this clearly-written volume is a chronological survey of Hegel's writings of 1787-1800. It traces his developing thought across not just the larger essays of this period but also the tiniest fragments. In it Williamson generally follows Harris and opposes Kaufmann *et al* in defending the well-worn thesis that Hegel's early interests are appropriately termed "theological." There is little to take exception to here and little that is new. The innovations emerge in the second part, against which I will lodge two significant objections. The third and final part contains this book's principal contribution to scholarship, a valuable discussion of the proper construal of Hegel's views on the relationship of God to the world, and on that of religious truth to philosophical truth.

The problematic second part begins with a competently-drawn overview of the *Phenomenology*'s stages in the evolution of self-conscious spirit toward the grasp of a universal content, one finally requiring translation from religious representation into absolute knowledge. This framework sets up Williamson's contentions that: A religious philosophy is the kernel and not just the husk of Hegel's system; the *Phenomenology* never becomes superseded (except in minor details) as Hegel's interpretive schema for religion; Hegel commonly handles progressions within religious stages, and those from one stage to the next, by replicating the dialectical structure of some specific lower-level analysis in the *Phenomenology* (e.g., that of "Perception," or of "Force and the Understanding").

Now although I share Williamson's special fondness for the *Phenomenology*, I must object to the way he goes on to use it virtually as an exegetical strait jacket for analysis of the "determinate religions." It is hardly a sufficient method for dealing with the later *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* to just mine them for illustrations of stages drawn from the peregrinations of the *Phenomenology*. Williamson does mention some discrepancies between these sources; but he generally downplays or buries in the footnotes the *Lectures*' alternative interpretations of religious phenomena. This procedure conveys the misleading impression that the *Phenomenology* definitively lays down the types and stages of religion and that subsequent treatments simply add illustrative detail. Moreover, Williamson says little about the religion of primitive peoples and of the Chinese, Hindus and Buddhists, but a good deal about the religion of the Persians, Egyptians, Syrians, Jews, Greeks and Romans. Is this unequal attention due simply to the higher status of the latter in Hegel's system? Or is it also because the *Phenomenology* is preoccupied with the latter, mainly under the heading "Religion as Art," and pays little heed to the former religions which do bulk large in the subsequent *Lectures*?

The author should not be blamed for another defect in part two. He wrote this book prior to publication of the new German critical edition of the *Lectures*.[1] This edition shows, by segregating materials from the different lecture series, that Hegel's interpretation and ordering of particular religions changed significantly from one series to the next. For example, in 1827 he reversed the previous sequence by treating Judaism after Greek religion and as the more advanced form in important respects. The upshot of this and other instances is not only that the *Phenomenology* lacks the definitive typology of religions, but also that there may not be one extractable from the *Lectures* either. Hegel's views on the determinate religions now appear to have been fluid right up to the end of his life! For this and the other reason already cited, Williamson's account of the determinate religions is not wholly reliable. The end of part two, however, is an exposition of the features of the absolute religion (Christianity) that is capably done and serves as a suitable lead-in to the final and valuable portion of the book.

The formal organization of part three reflects one of its two principal concerns: Hegel's view of the God-world relationship. Williamson efficiently and, I think, correctly disposes of two familiar options underlying the nineteenth century disputes between right-wing and left-wing Hegelians. Hegel is no traditional theist, whether trinitarian or deistic; his rejection of the classical asymmetrical relationship between Creator and creature, and his emphatic attacks on Enlightenment theology's abstract concepts of the understanding, show as much. Neither is Hegel an incipient atheist after the manner of Feuerbach, or of more recent "immanentist" interpreters such as Kojève, Kaufmann, or (perhaps) Findlay; Williamson argues that the divine itself has objective content and inherent validity,

since knowledge of it begins from God's own self-revelation and not from the side of human subjective experience. Elimination of these options leaves the question of whether Hegel is a pantheist, as Strauss and others thought. This in turn raises the issues of Hegel's philosophical relation to Spinoza and of the adequacy of Hegel's interpretation and criticism of Spinoza. In terms of pure scholarship, this is the most illuminating aspect of the entire book. Williamson delves beneath the usual superficial remarks about how Spinoza's substance is not truly subject or spirit, and asks how different the dynamic relation of *natura naturans* to *natura naturata* actually is from Hegel's dialectical and telic conception of the moments of absolute spirit's self-development. This discussion is meticulous and well-informed, even though Williamson's personal conclusions are controversial. They are that Hegel is best described as a panentheist, and that it is meaningless to ask about God apart from God's relatedness to the world even though God's being-for-the-world does not exhaust God's subjectivity. Hence process philosophy's distinction between God's primordial nature and consequent nature is close to, but not exactly the same as, Hegel's treatment of divine transcendence and immanence. Whether his conclusions be correct or not, Williamson poses these issues more fruitfully and insightfully than do most other discussions of them.

His second principal concern begins as an undercurrent in part three and surfaces near the end. Is philosophy's truth and substance the same as that of religion? The stakes are high, for if philosophy is distinct from, and superior to, religion in content as well as in form, then philosophy ought to supersede religion entirely (at least for intellectuals). But if on the contrary, as Williamson himself argues, the content is the same and philosophy's superiority is simply its ability to rise above the mode of representation and grasp that same content conceptually, then Hegel's system is implicitly and explicitly a religious philosophy; in fact it is just the authentically Christian trinitarian theology given its adequate speculative expression. In defending the latter position, Williamson criticizes Pannenberg's view of divine freedom as futurity and stresses instead the ontological and logical priority of the Notion to absolute spirit's actual self-development, as constituting the true locus of transcendence. In addition, although endorsing Fackenheim's depiction of speculative philosophy as the conceptual reenactment of the truth of the absolute religion, he contends that Hegel was mistaken in supposing that this reenactment decisively converts faith into knowledge. Instead the very thoughts and language of speculative philosophy are themselves inescapably mythological and symbolic. While this ending will doubtless warm the hearts of Tillichians and other theologians of a similar stripe, it may well chill the ardor of dedicated Hegelian philosophers for Williamson's other accomplishments in this volume.

NOTE

1. Edited by Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1983-85), vols. 3-5 in the series: *Hegel Vorlesungen*. English translation edited by Peter C. Hodgson, 3 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984-87).